



IN MEMORIAM
REMEMBERING RUTH SCHOTT O'BRIEN
1921–2012

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Ruth O'Brien, native plant specialist and curator of the Ruth O'Brien Herbarium located on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, passed away on December 26, 2012. Ruth was born October 13, 1921, in Sioux City, Iowa. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Bacteriology in 1945 from the University of Minnesota. Her family relocated to Corpus Christi, Texas in 1949 where she became interested in the native flora of Texas. It was this deep-rooted interest in native plants and taxonomy that led her to complete a Master's of Science degree in Biology from Corpus Christi State University (now TAMU-CC) in 1980. A year after graduating, she founded the university herbarium and became its curator in 1983.

She was interested in the mesquite brush community of plants because they were so adaptive to the area's many environments. Ruth had a thirst for knowledge, and said that her life mission was to pay back her debt to society through teaching and devoting her time and expertise to "her" herbarium. Recently, the Native Plant Society of Texas presented Ruth, Dr. Roy L. Lehman and Tammy White with the Donovan Stewart Correll Memorial Award for scientific writing in the field of native flora of Texas for their book *Plants of the Texas Coastal Bend*. She was also co-author of *Plants of Webb County* and wrote recovery plans for two local endangered

plant species for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Most of her time was spent at the herbarium identifying plants, answering questions from the public, teaching classes and laboratories and assisting graduate and undergraduate students in plant projects.

She was a member of numerous societies and volunteered many years of service. Most notably were the Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Native Plant Society of Texas, Corpus Christi Museum of Natural History, Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens, Daughters of the American Revolution and American Association of University Women. Through the years, Ruth and her husband, Joe, donated funds to improve the herbarium and, in 2008, started the Joseph A. and Ruth S. O'Brien Endowed Herbarium Internship. The couple also served on the TAMU-CC University President's Council for 18 years and was inducted into the Endowed Scholarship Council in October 2009.

Ruth completed 50 years of volunteer service for the Corpus Christi Museum of Natural History. In recognition, the museum named a wing after her which houses an extensive botanical and shell collection. During her residence at the museum she donated her time as a docent, auxiliary officer, board member and honorary curator of the Museum's herbarium. In addition, she volunteered for over 30 years at the herbarium on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus that is now named for her. She was a dedicated and talented scientist. Just late last year, I stopped by the university herbarium and there Ruth was, at the age of 91, working with graduate students on plant identifications. She was amazing!

I consider myself fortunate to have worked alongside Ruth for these past 22 years. She was a talented taxonomist that was able to explain to students the difficult details that are necessary to be successful in plant identifications. She had an eager intellect, a kind heart, and a wonderful sense of humor. She will be missed by her students, colleagues and friends.

It is with much affection, admiration and honor that I write these few words for Ruth.